

THE *Sach. 11/3*

Nature, Obligation, and Measures

OF

CONSCIENCE,

Deliver'd In A

SERMON,

PREACH'D Before

The Honourable Gentlemen of the *Grand-Jury*,

Sir *William Villiers*, Baronet.
Sir *Gilbert Pickering*, Baronet.
Sir *Richard Halford*, Baronet.
Sir *George Beaumont*, Baronet.
Sir *William Halford*, Kt. & Bar.
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Bartlett Street, Esq;
James Halsall, Esq;
William Hartopp, Esq;
William Welles, Gent.
Leonard Vow, Gent. &c

At the last Assizes held at Leicester.

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ACTS XXIII. I.

And Paul earnestly beholding the Council, said, Men and Brethren, I have liv'd in all Good Conscience, before God, until this Day.

THese Words are as 'twere a short History, and compendious Character of the Life of that Great Apostle *St. Paul*; and of the *Upright and Sincere Conscience*, that Adorn'd every Action in it. This was his Efficacious and Triumphant Argument, which he so Boldly urges in his Vindication; that he was Able to *insist* upon his *Integrity*, and *appeal* for its Proof to a *Trial* before God, the *Searcher of all Hearts*, and the whole World, the visible Witnesses of his Practice; that *He had kept a Conscience void of Offence, towards God, and towards Men.* 'Twas *This* that Fortify'd him with such a Manly Spirit; and Unshaken Courage, to Out-face all the malicious Accusations of his insidious Persecutors, to Bear up with a steady Chearfulness against the many Miseries and Disasters of a troublesome Life, and put to Silence the Reproaches of his most implacable Enemies. When we see him *Arraign'd* before the insulting *Jews*, from whom he cou'd as little expect *Justice*, as *Mercy*, how did *This* Astonish *Felix*, that Lustful and Covetous Magistrate (who thought to have Condemn'd him) and made the *Affrighted Judge Tremble*, instead of his *Suppos'd Criminal*? Such is the Power of a pure and unblemish'd *Conscience*; it casts a distinguishing Lustre, and amiable Regard upon its Possessor, can dignify *Chains* and *Fetters*, turn a *Prison* into a *Palace*, render *Poverty*, and even *Disgrace*, *Honourable*, and command *Reverence* and *Esteem* from its most malignant *Adversaries*. To obtain and

preserve which invaluable Blessing, no Difficulties or Labours can be so Painful, no Dangers or Distresses so Afflicting, no Suffering or Death so Sharp and Bitter, but what it will Sustain, Alleviate, and most amply Reward.

The nicest and most important Enquiry, that the Mind can be employ'd in, both for its Improvement and Satisfaction, is a just Search into its own State and Nature; whereby it may be capable of Discovering its own Graces and Infirmities, to Correct the One, and Advance the Other; and to Ground it self upon a rational Peace, and secure Tranquillity. Tho' indeed this requires no small Art and Care, thus to make the Soul descend and retire into her-self, bend all her Faculties inwards, and become the nearer Object of her own Contemplation; To dive into her own obscure Recesses and Mansions, and Trace through all the intricate Folds and Windings of the Heart, to Unveil its lurking Hypocrisy, Traverse its Springs and Motions, and to let a Light into those dark Corners of Iniquity, where Vice is first hatch'd and conceiv'd. Without this Spiritual Scrutiny, this Domestic Inquisition (as we may call it) in our Breast, a Man's Life never can be just and regular, or his Actions even and Self-consistent, as being Guided by no Law, and Directed by no Conduct. Therefore every Man that pretends to the right Use of his Reason, and does not Live and Act at Random, must think himself concern'd to Establish a Certain Sett of Fundamental Notions and Principles in his Thoughts; which upon a thorough Search, and mature Deliberation, he lays down and settles, as the eternal Basis and Touchstone of Truth, as an unalterable Scheme and Model of Morality to himself, and as the controuling, and governing Maxims of his practical Behaviour. This is what he Dignifies with the awful Title of Conscience, and is That internal Compass of his Soul, by which he Professes to steer the whole Course and Tenour of his Actions.

Now from the infinite Multiplicity, and Variety of Opinions, wherein Mens Minds as much differ as their Features, there may seem to Arise as many Sorts of Consciences, as there are Diversity of Judgments in the World: Hence we find Vertues and Vices taking their several Colours and Denominations according to the different Capacity, or Use of Reason, the sundry Tempers, Inclinations, Interests and Designs of Parties, that Form and Espouse such and such Farring

Sentiments. So that he who takes an impartial Survey of all the multifarious, unaccountable, and repugnant *Conclusions* of Mankind, and their *Deportment* Consequent thereupon, and considers their irreconcilable Contrariety to each other; and yet sees with what tenacious *Confidence*, and perverse *Obstinacy*, they are on all sides embrac'd and asserted, will be inclinable to suspect, That there is no such Thing as *True Conscience* in the World; or that Men are not yet *Agreed* in the *Meaning* of This amusing, but unintelligible *Word*: A *Word*, the *Force* of which, is much sooner felt than understood; that strikes the *Senses*, deeper than the *Judgment*; and usually carries in it all the *Mischief*, that *Ignorance* and *Prejudice*, blind *Zeal* and inveterate *Malice*, *Enthusiasm* and *Superstition* are able to Attempt and Execute. Upon which account, this mistaken *Word Conscience*, has been often found to be no better than a meer *Sound* and *Shadow*, to disguise the most Fatal and Devilish *Impostures*, to cover the blackest *Treason* and *Rebellion*, *Heresy*, *Schism*, and *Blasphemy*; and shelter the most astonishing *Impiety* under its specious, and sanctify'd *Umbrage*. For what else is it, that has been the Cause of almost all the *Civil Wars*, *Persecutions*, and *Massacres*, that for so many Years involv'd *Christendom* in *Blood* and *Fury*, Destroy'd so many *Princes* and *Churches*, with *Regicide* and *Sacrilege*, depopulated so many *Dominions*, and lavish'd so much *Treasure*; and in a manner Overturnd the very *Foundations* of *Christianity*, under the *Godly Pretence* of Religion? What is it, I say, but this *Word*, *Conscience*, Misunderstood and Misapply'd, which like an *Holy Sham*, or rather *Diabolical Inspiration*, has seiz'd and possess'd the giddy and senseless *Multitude*, with *Infatuation* and *Phrenzy*, and driven them Headlong into their Own, and their *Country's* Perdition? Nothing certainly has brought greater *Calamities* upon the *World*, or led the way to more dangerous *Mistakes*, than the want of a *due Distinction* in its *Nature*, and a *just Limitation* of it, in its *Rights* and *Power*. Which as 'tis a weighty Subject, proper for all Times, as containing the grounds of our *Happiness* or *Misery*, as well in this *World* as the *Next*; so I presume, it may be in no wise *Unsuitable* to the present *Solemnity*, which may frequently have no small Share in the *Examination* of its *Pretences*, in order to the right *Administration* of *Justice*, by the unquestionable *Authority* of such *Legal Magistrates*, as we are bound to submit to, not only for *Wrath*, but *Conscience* sake. I shall therefore within as little a *Compass*, as the *Copiousness* of this large *Point*, and the small *Portion* of *Time* allow'd me will permit, endeavour,

I. First;

Measures of Conscience.

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- I. *First*, To Enquire into the *True Nature*, and the *Just Bounds*, and *Measures of Conscience*.
- II. *Secondly*, To propose some Considerations, whereby a *false and erroneous Conscience* may be Distinguish'd from a *sincere and true one*.
- III. *Thirdly*, To lay down those *general Laws*, whereby the *Conscience* is to be *Regulated*, and shew how they ought to be *Apply'd*.

I. And First, I will Enquire into the *true Nature*, and the *just Bounds*, and *Measures of Conscience*. And this I shall do, *First*, from *Scripture*, and, *Secondly*, from *Reason*.

Some of the *School-men*, as well as Others of the *Ancient*, and *Modern Writers of Casuistical Divinity*, in their Speculations on this Subject, have, not undeservedly, been Taxed for *Darkning* it with so many *unnecessary, frivolous, and intricate Notions*, that they seem rather to have endeavour'd to *confound*, and *perplex Mens Minds*, with *impertinent Doubts and Difficulties*, than to propose such *Remedies*, as might effectually *solve* their *Scruples*, and *Fears*. Tho' the *Scripture* is so very *clear and plain* in this Matter, that from the frequent *Use* and *Energy* of this Word *Conscience* therein, it will be found to carry this *General Import* in it, namely, *The Knowledge of a Natural, or Divine Law, join'd with an Application of it, to some particular Instance of Practice, to which it is adequately suited, and adapted*. Out of the many Places that occur in the *New Testament*, to establish this Notion of *Conscience*, it may be sufficient to quote one or two, which give in the Sense of the rest. St. Paul, in his *Epistle to the Romans*, Chap. II. V. 14, 15, 16. speaking of the *Gentiles*, who had no other *Guide* of their Actions, but the *Law of Nature*, or *Reason rightly inform'd*, expressly declares, that *this* was to them, the *Rule of their Conscience*, whereby they were to be *Judg'd* at the last Day, and *Acquitted or Condemn'd*. For (says he) *when the Gentiles which have not the Law* (that is the *Mosaick or Reveal'd Law*) *do by Nature the things contain'd in the Law, these having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves; which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their Conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while Accusing, or else Excusing one another, in the Day when God shall judge the Secrets of Men, by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel*. In the same Chapter, v. 12. Discourfing concerning the State of the *Jews*, who had the *Lively Oracles of God's written Word*, and the *Law of Moses* superinduc'd upon the *Law of Reason*, to illustrate and inlarge it, says, *as many as have sin'd in the Law, shall be judged by the Law*, which extends the *Obligation of Conscience*, with regard to them, from the *Law of Nature* to that of a further *Reveal'd, Positive Law*. But in his *Epistle to Titus*, c. 1. v. 15. the *Apostle* speaking concerning the State of *Christianity*, that had the *Supream Priviledge* of an entire *Revelation of the Divine Law*, he says, *of Errors in Judgment and Practice, unto the Pure all things are Pure; but unto them that are Defil'd and unbelieving, is nothing Pure, but even their Mind and Conscience is Defil'd*; where we find *Mind* added to *Conscience*, to Explain and Adjust its Meaning, denoting the *Intellectual Faculty* of the *Soul* Judging upon any *Moral Point*, together with an *Application* of it to *Practice*. So that here is a *Complex and Relative Idea*, carrying a *double Notion* in it of *Conscience*, which with Respect to its *Operation*, is also

also *Twofold*. *First*, Relating to what is *pass'd*, Judging it self to have either done *Well*, or *Ill*; or *Secondly*, Relating to its *present Duty*, *Advising* and *Directing* us in the *Necessity*, *Legality* or *Illegality* of any thing, that ought to be done, or not done by us. Which Division results from the *Two Faculties*, or rather *Reflex Actions* of the Soul, in *Contemplating* and Judging what is *present*, or in *Deliberating* on what is *Pass'd*, either *Justifying* and *Acquitting*, or *Accusing* and *Condemning* us before God and Our *Conscience*. Under one of these *Two Notions*, most Places in the *New Testament*, and those that may seem to correspond to them in the *Old*, are Understood.

This is the *Short and General Account* that *Revelation* has given us of this Matter; and it would have been well, if Men had *Rested* here, and been Contented with the *plain and easy Determinations* of the *Scriptures*; which had left *no room* for *Doubts* and *Ambiguities*, and had prevented all those *Sophistical Subtilties*, which have been since *Invented* by Men of *Fesuitical*, and *Fanatical Brains*; who have *refined* the express *Rules of Human Duty* into *Whymfical* and *Inexplicable Theories*; have *Clogg'd* and *Surrounded* it with *useless* and *surprizing Questions*, *Spinose Obstacles*, and *Abstruse Distinctions*, laid in the *Dark*, as so many *Mystical Snares*, and *Spiritual Gins* to catch Men's *Consciences*, and plunge them into the unfathomable *Abyss* of *GOD's Prescience*, *Decrees*, and *Predestination*; Things which the *Thoughts* of Men, which are not as *God's thoughts*, can never *Fix* or *Determine*. These *Legerdemain Craftsmen* in *Divinity*, who thus handle the *Word of God* *deceitfully*, ought justly to *Inherit* the *Woes* denounc'd by *GOD*, (*Ezek. Chap. 13.*) against *their Brethren*, the false *Prophets*, *Who Daw'd with untemper'd Mortar*, *Prophecy'd out of their Own Hearts*, *follow'd their Own Spirit*, *saw Vanity* and *Driv'd Lyes*, *seducing the People*. *Will Ye pollute Me* (says *GOD*) *among my People*, *for bandfuls of Barley and for pieces of Bread*, *to slay the Souls that should not die*, and *to save the Souls alive that should not live*, *by your Lying to my People that bear your Lyes*. Wherefore thus saith the *Lord God*. *Behold I am against your pillows*, *where-with Ye there Hunt the Souls to make 'em fly*, and *I will tear them from Your Arms*, and *will let the Souls go*, *even the Souls that Ye hunt to make 'em fly*. *Because with Lyes Ye have made the Heart of the Righteous sad*, *whom I have not made sad*, and *strengthen'd the hands of the Wicked*, *that he should not return from his wicked way by promising him Life*. How *Applicable* is this *Character* to those Men, who instead of serving the *Great Purposes* of *Morality* and *Religion*, which ought to be represented as *Easy* and *practicable*, as it is *Inviting* and *Agreeable* (which certainly raises both the *Dignity*, and *Excellency* of the *Law*, and *Supream Legislator*) when they should have helpt the *Lame*, and *Blind*, out of the *pit* they were *fallen* into, and assisted the *Infirmities*, and *Necessities* of the *Weak*, and *Impotent*, *Intangle 'em deeper in the Mire*, *Enhancing their Miseries*, *Exaggerating their Guilt*, *Frightening 'em with false Apprehensions*, and *Imaginary Scruples*, and in a *Word raising that Devil*, which they were never *Able* again *sufficiently* to *Lay*. These are doubtless *faithful pastors*, and *Stewards of God's holy Myseries*, who feed his *Servants* with *Stones* instead of *Bread*, and in lieu of *wholesome* and *heavenly Repast* of his *Word*, set before them, *noisome Serpents*, and *deadly Scorpions*!

But to proceed, Let us see how far the *plain Principles* of *Reason*, and *Revelation*, will carry Us in the *Discovery* of the *True Nature* of this *Point*. Upon a *Survey* of it, we shall find, that all the *Modes*, or *Affections*

Measures of Conscience.

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of either the *Mind*, or *Conscience*, which are only so many different *States*, or degrees of its *Operation*, will be comprehended under these *Four*, namely,

1. A *Clear, Upright, and well-Instructed Conscience.*
2. A *probable Conscience.*
3. A *doubtful, or Scrupulous Conscience.*
4. An *Erroneous Conscience.*

These four *Sorts of Consciences*, take their *rise* from, and are grounded upon the different *Evidence* of any *practical Object*, proposed to the *Mind*, and the *clearness* and *distinction*, or the *Obscurity* and *Confusion*, of the *Ideas* that it *Frames* thereof.

1. If the *Matter* it deliberates upon, be a *Thing* in its *Nature*, *plain*, and *intelligible*, not Incumbred with *Difficulties* and *Doubts*, and such as appears either *Necessary*, or *lawful* to be done, and consequently a *duty*; or *illegal*, and *Necessary* to be *Abstained* from, and consequently a *Sin*; as on the *One Hand* *prohibited*, or on the *Other Injoyned*, by *divine*, *human*, or *Moral Laws*; and a *Man* acts accordingly in these *Cases*, with a *Full persuasion* of *Mind*, and the *Assent* of his *Conscience*, *Guiding* and *Governing* it self by such *Rules*, as are *adequate*, and *suited* to its several *Actions*: such a *Person* certainly goes upon the *Principles* of a *Sincere, Upright, and truly Instructed Conscience.*

2. But, *Secondly*, if the *Matter* proposed to the *Mind*, has not this *clearness* and *Evidence* in it self, either thro the *Intricacies*, it may be *Involv'd* in by its *Nature*, or the *Obscurity*, and *Ambiguity* of its *circumstances*, or the *Want* of a *full*, and *exact distinction* in the *Law*, *prohibiting* or *injoyn-ing*: the *Understanding* having fully *weighed* the *doubts*, and *Objections* on all the *Sides*, and *Ballanc'd* the *Matter* with all the *Justice* and *Equity* that it can; and finding the *Reasons* on the *One hand* *preponderating* those on the *Other*: upon such an *impartial Survey*, and *Scrutiny*, the *Conscience* determining on the *probable Part*, proceeds according to its *Judgment*, and acts upon the *Decision* of *Argument*, and *colour*, not apprehending any *Apparent Evil*, express *illegality*, or *Inexpediency* in its *Action*. This is the *probable conscience*, and will *Justify* where all *proper Means* are us'd for its *Instruction*.

3. But, *Thirdly*, if the *Mind* upon a *Survey* of all *Sides*, finds it self *pois'd* in an *Equilibrium* betwixt *Both*; if the *Reasons* appear *equally clear*, *strong*, and *convincing* on *either Side*, and it knows not how to *Fudge*, or *determine* its *Election*, and the *Law* relating to this *Matter*, may be either *dubious*, *equivocal*, *indifferent*, or perhaps *silent*: if the *conscience* hangs thus under a *State of Neutrality*, and as 'twere *declines* and *suspends* its *consent*, and yet the *Person* *Act* without it, this is a *doubting conscience*, and the *Man* under its *conduct* is *Guilty of Sin*, if he does so. But if it does *Assent*, his *Action* is so far *Justifiable*, as it appears not *Offending* against any *positive* and *plain prohibition*, or *law*. For the *Negative*, being of infinite *Extent* and *Latitude*, makes *Great* and *Just Room* for *Allowances*, in these *dubious Cases*. But if the *Conscience* apprehends, or *Suspects* any *Evil* (tho' perhaps *False*) in the *Matter* of its *Action*, otherwise in it self *Legal*, which is the *Case* of a *Scrupulous Conscience*, it is under an *Obligation* of *Not-Acting*, because no *Action* is *Justifiable*, that is *Against*, or *Without* the *Consent* of the *Mind*.

4. But, *Lastly*, if the *Mind* is not *Rightly Instructed*, or *Inform'd*, as to the *Matter* of its *Action*, and frames a *wrong Judgment* of its *Legality*, or *Illegality*, from a *false*, or *confus'd Apprehension* of, or *Ignorance* in, the *Law*, and *Nature* of the *Action*, or is distorted, or misled, by *Passion*, *Prejudice*, *Interest*, *Pride*, *Lust*, or any other *sinister Means*, this is an *Erroneous Conscience*, bringing always *Guilt* upon the *Actor*, and *Involving* Him in *Sin*, according to that *Racciv'd Maxim*, That, the *Ignorance* of the *Law* can never *Excuse* a *Delinquent*.

Now

Now the First of these Consciences proceeds upon either Faith, or Demonstration, in the Infallible Revelation of God, or the certain Measures of Reason.

The Second proceeds upon the Grounds of Probable, or Moral Certainty, a Rational Belief, Persuasion, or Opinion.

The Third cannot proceed but according to the Degrees of Assent, or Election; and

The Fourth proceeds upon Ignorance, or Error.

This I hope may seem to be no Obscure or Indistinct Account of the Nature of Conscience, as taking in, all its Properties, consider'd under the Principles of Reason, and the Gradual Light, and different Advancements, that it makes under its Conduict; and I presume, this may be the most Natural and Just way of Explaining it, and which clears off all those Abuse Perplexities, other Mystical Interpretations bring upon it. For certainly every Man's Conscience, either is, or ought to be Govern'd by Rational Motives, which are the Supream Commands of the Understanding on its Subjects, the Will and Affections, never to be Disputed, never to be Disobeyed without Rebellion against their Spiritual Sovereign.

This being Premis'd, as a Rational View of the Nature and Obligation of Conscience in General, and its several Parts, Modes, or Habitudes in Particular, I come in the next place,

II. Secondly, To propole some Considerations, whereby a False, and Erroneous Conscience, may be Distinguish'd from a Sincere, and True One. What has been before Remark'd, in Settling the Distinct Bounds of Each, might be in it self, sufficient to Discover the Difference; but perhaps it will appear much more Evident to Those, who for want of Time, or Skill, at first View cannot fully comprehend These Abstracted Notions, and follow the Mind thorough all the Dark Labyrinth of its secret Operations, if We proceed more fully to Display, in their proper Colours, all those False Pretences, that are so apt to Delude and put upon Our Judgments, and Deceive Us with the Empty Shadows, and Visionary Appearances of Religion. Among all which there is none, that with so much Artifice and Illusion, Palms the insinuating Imposture upon Our credulous Faith, as the plausible Disguise of Interest. This will so Fatally Over-rule the Conscience, so Warp its Judgment, and Blind its Discerning Faculties, that in time, it will intirely Depose it from its Dominion, and Usurp its Place and Authority: so that tho' it has Eyes, they shall not See; tho' it has Ears, it shall not Hear; tho' it has Understanding, it shall not Understand. In this Case a Man Forfeits the Exalted Priviledge of his Reason, and Degrades it to the base Servitude of his Passions; He Argues, not from his Understanding, but his Flesh and Blood; and how weak the Demonstrative Force of a Syllogism is, in Opposition to the more powerful Fallacy of Our Appetites, Experience is sufficient to Convince Us. For, is not this Interest the Great Diana of the World, to whose Silver Shrines its Religious Potaries pay the most Devout Homage, and implicit Adoration? What is there that the Exorbitant Power of This cannot effect, when it shall teach a Man to Renounce his Senses, Careless Fraud, Adore Nonsense, Abandon his Creed, and give the Eye to the Holy Spirit of GOD within him? When Duty and Interest Clash and Interfere, how Purblind does it render Our Judgments? How difficult is it to view the Difference? How many Artificial Quirks, Subterfuges, and Equivocations, are immediately found out, to keep the Peace betwixt 'em? Such shrewd Sophisters are never at a Loss for saving Distinctions, To Keep what they have, and Get what They can: This being the Grand Maxim: which the Wise Men of this World lay down as the Foundation of all their Politicks; whereby they are so easily brought to Comply, and Fall in with such Principles and Practices, as are most likely to Promote it. It is the Melancholly Amusement only of Men of Letters and Philosophy, to Live and Feed upon Ideas, and Dispute about Imaginary Felicity; Those who can Contemplate Naked Truth, and Vertue without Reward, are likely to get Nothing else for their Labour; but must Expect

to be as Contemptible, and Destitute, as *Truth*, and *Virtue* usually are. But the *Children of this World* are taught to be *Wiser in their Generation than the Children of Light*; they Trouble not themselves with the *Merit* of their *Cause*, or *Party*; they are not Fetter'd. or Confin'd with the *Little, Strait-lac'd Notions* of rigid *Justice* and *Honesty*; they are for a *Latitude*, both of *Thought*, and *Action*; a *Licentious Immunity* from *All Legal Restraint*; which, with their *Peculiar Talents* of *Impudence*, and *Falshood*, they Rick not to call *Liberty of Conscience*, and presume to Challenge, as *That Freedom of Will*, which, they say, is the *Universal Knowledge of Mankind*. As if *That Liberty of Conscience*, which the *Government* has Indulg'd to *such Persons alone*, whose *Real Scruples* will not permit them to join in the *Established Communion*, could ever be intended to Shelter such, as have not the least Pretence to the *very Name of Conscience*; or to impower *Deists*, *Socinians*, and *Atheists*, to Revile, *Ridicule*, and *Blaspheme* Our most *Holy Faith*, and *Church*, at their Pleasure, with *Impunity*. Thus *Viciously* are Our *Laws* Abus'd, and this *Sacred Name* play'd upon, to the foul *Dis-honour* of *GOD*, and the *Disgrace* of *Religion*; which now a-days is made the *Pharisaical*, and *Puritan Cloak*, like *Samuel's Mantle*, to Amuse the *Witch*, and Cover the *Devil*, and Consecrate *All Infidelity*, *Injustice*, *Pride*, *Lust*, *Avarice*, and *Ambition*, and the most execrable *Vices of Hell*, with the *Holy Title of Conscience*; which, in sad Truth, is nothing else, but the *Vizor-Mask* of *Cousenage*, *Knavery*, and *Hypocrisy*; it is the *spiritual Tool* to serve the Turn of all wicked *Designs*, meer *Party-Cant*, and *Fanatical Fargon*, the very Sound whereof should be a *Warning-Piece* to *Alarm* every *Honest Man* to stand upon his *Guard*, and *Look about Him*.

Whatever Pretences these *Time-serving Men* may *Gild* their *crafty Stratagems* with, it will be found at last, that They are *Nothing* but downright *Political Atheists*: For they are really *Indifferent* to every *Self*, or *Religion*; *Espouse* Neither, but as it Suits with their *Advantage*; and, as *That changes*, are *Ready* still to *Obeys* its *Motions*, *shift* with the *Scene*, *swim* with the *Tide*, and *veer* to every *Point* of the *Compass*, as the *Wind* that serves 'em, *commands*. They are as *Dissonant* in their *Opinions* and *Practices*, as those are *Inconsistent* with the *Laws of GOD*; and, in a Word, on every *Occasional prospect of Gain*, are their *Own Reverse*, and one *Continued Practical-Self-Contradiction*. To *Verify* this *Infamous* and most *abominable Character*, which 'tis a *Shame* should be found in any *Nation professing* the *Name of Christian*, have We not, to the *Disappointment* of both Our *Laws*, *Civil* and *Ecclesiastical*, a *Sett* of *Miscreants* suffer'd amongst Us, and Those even *pretending* to more *Sanctity* and *Conscience*, than the rest of *Mankind*, who not only *Dare Openly Own*, and *Practice*, but even *Presume* to *Justify* this *Amphibious Conformity*; who to *Qualify* themselves for a *paultry Place*, can *slyly creep* to those *Altars* they *Proclaim Idolatrous*, *Join* in a *Communion* they *Revile* as *Superstitious*, and *swallow* that *Sacrament*, which at other times they *Refuse*, as *Damnation*. And, indeed, in this *Tremendous Case*, it ought to be the *Wish* of every *charitable Christian*, that they may not, in such a *solemn* and *deliberate Act* of the *Worst of Hypocrisy*, *Eat and Drink* their own *Damnation*, not *Discerning* the *Lord's Body*. Such *Men*, like *Esau*, that *Reprobate* of *GOD*, would doubtless *Barter* their *spiritual Birthright* for a *Mess of Pottage*; like *Gehazi*, they will *Impudently Lye*, (and not have so much *Shame* as He had to *Disown* it,) for *Chinges of Rayment*, and *Talents of Silver*: they inherit *Naaman's Crime*, more *Odious* and *Stinking* than His *Leprosy*; who, to keep his *Post* in the *Government*, could *bow down in the House of Rimmon*, and yet acknowledge

the God of Israel; in a Word, They Out-do that Amazing, and Irremissible Sin, of the Son of Perdition, the Arch-Traytor Judas himself, in that, they Dayly sell and betray their Lord and Saviour, for Money. And would not (think Ye) the Primitive Church have Thunder'd out its Anathema's, against such Daring, and Insolent Offenders? Would it not have spewed these Vipers out of Her Communion, whose crying Sins call aloud to Heaven, for that Just Vengeance, they have not yet found upon Earth?

Thus Fatally can the Dominion of Interest Sway Mens Fair and Practice, and Suborn both, to the Mammon of Unrighteousness. For a Man to quit his Temporal Honours, and Estate in *This Life*, for another in *Reverſion* in the Next, is such an Uneasy Exchange of Title, that Our Blessed Saviour himself could not (humanly speaking) Perswade the Rich Man in the Gospel, to Comply with, tho' We are told, He was no Ordinary Proficient in Piety. And where Interest, and Religion, come to stand in Competition, there are not Few who would follow His Example, and Turn their Backs upon their Saviour. Infomuch that the Devil thought himself secure of Betraying the very Son of God, when He gave him the pompous View, and alluring Promise of *this World*. Which really are Temptations, that induce Good, as well as Great Men, sometimes to Fall down, and Worship, and which require no small Pitch of Vertue, and Resolution, to Baffle, and Withstand: This is the tenderest Part of Nature, and no Wonder if it sometimes gives way, when 'tis Assaulted on the Weakest side. How often have We seen, when a shining Preferment has Dazled, and Warm'd the Conscience, of some Ambitious, or Indigent Persons, how Wonderfully it has Softened, and Relaxed their Rigid Principles, and suddenly, and almost as effectually Wrought a Conversion in their Opinions, as the Light that from Heaven struck down St. Paul? It requires indeed a full Conviction, of the Infallible Truth of Our Principles, and the Merit of Our Cause, and a Stanch Resolution, raised upon the serious Deliberation of Both, with a lively Sense of Our Obligations to, and an awful Fear of GOD's Justice, to keep Men Steadfast, Unmovable, and Inflexibly Persevering in their Religious Sentiments. Yet notwithstanding the Difficulty, it will be still found to be as much our True Interest, as Real Duty, upon which a Good Conscience always keeps its Eye fixt and Unwavering, and is like the GOD that it serves without Variableness, or Shadow of Change. It consults its Innocence, not its Security; Follows Christ to the Cross, as well as to the Crown; and is as Ready to suffer for, as to Reign with Him. It maintains a constant, and Uniform Course of Integrity, never Deviating from its self, and the plain Road of Truth and Honesty. It knows no Latitude, comprehensive Shifts, or Doubles, in its Principles, but is, as the Object of its Worship, the same to day, to morrow, and for ever.

2. The Second Thing that Deceives Us under the Pretence of Conscience is Prejudice. * This is an Infant Principle, that takes Root deep in the Man, and spreads large in the Understanding; like the Mustard-seed in the Gospel, that from a slender, and Minute Grain, shoots up, and Enlarges into the Boughs, and Branches, of a Tree. From a Little, and insensible Beginning, it rises up to a Firm, strong, and Irradicable Habit in the Soul, being join'd with Pride, Obstinacy, and Self-Love, is made almost Inseparable from it. From hence 'tis, that so Great a Part of the World, owe those few Notions of Conscience, and Religion, that they have, either to the Fashions, and Customs, of the Country they are Born in, or the Methods, and Ways of Education, in which They are Bred; nay, some to the

the *Callings*, and *Professions*, in which they are Accidentally Train'd up, not a few to the *Conversation*, and *Company*, that they keep, others to the *Authority* of such Persons as they Confide in, and others to their Own *Constitution*, *Singularity*, and *Condition*. And how hardly are Men brought to Search Impartially into the Truth, and Foundation of their Opinions; and therefore much more, to Relinquish those *Principles*, which they have cherish'd, as the Rules of their Conduct, and *Darling Friends* to long? They had rather Believe with an *Implicit Faith*, take their Creed by Report, and venture its Consequence, than be at the Trouble and Uneasiness, of canvassing its Articles. Thus Error being first Entertain'd, Pleads *Prescription* against Truth, and injoying a long *Prepossession* in the Mind, Usurps its Place, and excludes its Entrance, stops up the Passage of Reason, and the Avenues of Conviction; it Ingrosses the *Intellectual Man*, makes him Peevish and Sour, Perverse and Reticent, and Incapacitates Him for Reformation. And no wonder, when his Judgment is thus basely Brib'd, and Retain'd, that it gives him *Wrong Counsel*; and like a *Deceitful Lawyer*, Betrays that Cause, it ought to Defend. A Man may therefore, in this Case, have a full Acquiescence in his *False Sentiments*, and esteem his *Conscience Sincere*, and *True*, while He is Insensible, that it is Grounded on an Error; because the Mistake is *Early Imbib'd*, and has been long received. And that which makes this Matter, of so *perilous* a Consequence, is, that it may Insinuate it self into Our *Fundamental Articles*, vitiate and Diminish Our Faith, and thereby Endanger Our Eternal Salvation. For it is a Truth (tho' seemingly severe) that can never too often be Inculcated, that an *Erroneous Perswasion is as Damnable, as an Immoral Life*; it being almost inconceivable, that the Cause and Effect should not correspond, that a *Bad Tree should bring forth Good Fruit*, or a Man Believe Ill, and at the same time Live Well. So that there's no Question, but that any one may really think his *Conscience Upright*, and *Unbias'd*, when 'tis Govern'd by these *Prejudices*; and tho' He Acts in Conformity to them, find himself after his Death, in a *Gross Mistake* in the other World, and *Recant* when it is too late. For, GOD having laid before Us his Law, in the most *Obvious*, and *Intelligible Terms*, with a Command to Try, Examine, Direct, and Judge our Consciences by That Rule, has left Us without Excuse, for not so Doing, and may Justly Inflict an *Eternal Punishment* of Our Neglect in this Matter. Neither will here the Pretence of a *Good Intention* any ways Mitigate the Crime, Annul the Guilt, or Indemnify the Offender, unless only in Cases of *Invincible Ignorance*. Such a Dangerous Misfortune is it, to be set wrong at first, and seasoned with *corrupt Principles*, which may in time gain an Absolute and uncontrollable Dominion in the Soul, derive a Fatal and Inevitable Propension upon the whole Conscience, which may Debauch the True Faith, and subvert the very Foundations of Justice and Piety. How *High-flown*, and *Liable soever*, this Doctrine may seem to the Reflections of some *Latitudinarian Divines*, who place *Morality* above Faith; and who would be thought to Imitate the Example, without Believing in, or Trusting to the Merits, and Satisfaction of their Redeemer; it is undeniably evident, from the Express Words of the Gospel, that the *Jews*, who Crucified the Messiah, and persecuted him after his Death, in his Apostles, thought themselves bound in Conscience, to commit these execrable Sins, and that they did God good Service thereby. Whereas those very Apostles always Charge 'em with these heinous Crimes, as *Unpardonable*, without Repentance; for that this *Erroneous Judgment*, tho' proceeding from Ignorance, was sufficient to

conſign 'em over to Everlaſting Damnation, unleſs Chriſt Interceed for 'em at the Right Hand of GOD, as He did upon the Croſs, Father Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

3. The *Third Inſtance*, that may Cheat Us under the Appearance of True Conſcience, is *Paſſion*. This Impoſes upon Us in a *Thouſand Shapes*, and requires great Sagacity to Diſcover it. It were not Difficult to Dilate on this Copious Subject, and ſhew at large, how the various Representations of Good and Evil, and thoſe painted Scenes of Pleaſure, and Pain, which they ſo Lively Deſcribe in the *Imagination*, Work up thoſe ſeveral *Senſations*, and *Ideas*, in the *Mind*, which are as 'twere the internal Springs, and *Wheels*, and that ſecret kind of *Mechaniſm*, that Sets the Whole Man a Going. Whoever looks into his Own Breſt, cannot but be Conſcious, how from His *Admiration* and *Deſire*, his *Love* and *Hatred*, his *Foy* and *Sorrow*, his *Anger* and *Pity*, his *Hope* and *Fear*, his *Jealouſy* and *Deſpair*, his *Shame* and *Honour*, his *Envy* or *Diſdain*, &c. all his *Actions*, according to their different *Obj-cts*, are Produc'd, and Regulated. Theſe are the *Cords* of a Man, (as the Prophet *Hoſea* Figuratively expreſſes it) whereby He is vehemently Drawn, and Seduc'd, oftentimes againſt his *Reason*, by the powerful Force of his *Inclination* and *Affection*: Which as 'tis variously Predominant in Men, *Writhe*s, and *Diſtort*s the *Conſcience* into the ſame *Irregular Figure*. *Fear*, the ſtrong, and moſt violent of the *Paſſions*, when once deeply Seated in the *Soul*, *Tyrannizes* over it in a very Insolent and Imperious manner; raiſing up *Mean*, and *Unworthy Thoughts* in it, and *Degrading* it to all the *Servile*, and *pitiful Compliances* in the World. Thoſe *Crude*, and *Unmanly* Notions of Religion, which it produces in ſome Perſons, may be lookt upon, rather as a *Melancholly Indispoſition* in the *Blood*, than a *Diſaffection* in the *Underſtanding*, which doubtleſs does in a great Measure Follow, and Obey the Conſtitution of the *Body*. Under ſuch a *ſpleeneick Complexion*, the *Mind* cannot Act brisk, and ſprightly upon its *Organs*, and *Judge*, and *Reason* perſpicuouſly as it ought to do: On the other hand, *Self-ſufficiency*, *pride*, and a bitter *Zeal* make Men *Supercilious*, *Cruel*, *Aspiring*, and *Preſuming*; *Arrogant* in themſelves, *Insolent* to their *Neighbours*, and even impudently *Familiar*, and *Sawey* towards *God*. Now the *Motions* of theſe *Paſſions* being ſo very Turbulent, and Rapid, they ſilence, and drown the ſtill Voice of *Reason*, allow it not Time to recollect it ſelf, but *Hurry* it away blindfold into *Sin*. Every other *Paſſion* has its particular *Charm* to *Intoxicate*, and way of *Operation* to *Deceive* the *Underſtanding*, that it may not Diſtinguiſh betwixt *Specious Sophiſtry*, and the true *Commands* and *Laws* of an *Unbyſſed*, and *Uncorrupted Conſcience*.

4. To this of *Paſſion*, may be added another *Cauſe* of Error in the *Conſcience*, not much unlike it in Nature, and that is, *Humour*, or *Phancy*, which is the ſenſual Operation of a *Whymiſical*, and *Deprav'd Will*, which inclines Men through a *Sceptical* Diſpoſition, to Hunt after *Novelties*, fall in Love with odd *Hypotheſes*, and *Conjectures*, Catch at *Phantoms*, and at length to far Deceive themſelves, as to Credit their Own *Dreams*, and *Réveries*. A fort of *Magick Inchantment* in the *Underſtanding*, a *Romantiſk Scene* of Life, made up of *Air* and *Invention*, in which Men Walk as 'twere in their Sleep, and Converſe in a *Vision*: It uſually poſſeſſes Men of ſtrong *Imaginations*, and *Weak Judgments*, and ſo Inſatuates the *Reason*, that it deprives it of the Power of *Diſtinguiſhing* betwixt *Caprice*, and Religion, betwixt the *Spiritual*, and *Natural Inclinations*, or the *Motions* of the *Superior*, and *Inferior Soul*. This may ſpring perhaps from the *Irregular Heat* of a too *Volatile* and *Diſturb'd Brain*, which may put the *Spirits* into a *Confus'd Ferment*, a *Precipitate* and *Violent Career*, and thereby give the *Lower Principles* of *Senſation*, a Predominancy over the Powers of *Right Reason*. This (as a *Learned Writer*, with a *Curious Felicity* of *Expreſſion*, ſtiles it) may be called an *Animal Conſcience*, Ariſing from, and being Governed by the *Imagination*, and bearing the ſame Relation to the *Senſitive Representations* of it, as the *True Conſcience* bears to the *Rational* *Repreſentations*, and *Operations*.

Incurable Delusion, which God permits some *Willful, Self-Conceited, and Headstrong* Persons to fall into; whose *Pride, and Ignorance* sets them above the *Wholesome Doctrine, and Wise Ordinances of the Church*, and persuades them to prefer their Own vain and *stiff Inventions*, before the *Eternal Oracles of Truth*, and the unerring Light of *Divine Revelation*. Whereupon the *Holy Ghost* has thought fit to Caution all *Sober Christians*, against the *Madness of such Frantick Zealors*, by stigmatizing them with that *Just, but Vile Character, of being Deserted by his Blessed Influence, given up to their Own Inclinations, to strong Delusions, and to the Belief of a Lye*; as it is frequently observed of Men much Addicted to such *Obstinate Humours*, from a long, *Habitual Indulgence* in them, they come at last to *Impose more upon Themselves than others*; and which is the most wretched, and despicable Condition, a Mortal can fall under, to *swallow their Own Falshoods, and Believe their Own Fictions*. To this *Wild, and Enthusiastick Infatuation*, we ought to appropriate the Rise of *Heresy*, (which on this very account, is doubtless, by *St. Paul* reckon'd among the *Works of the Flesh*, tho' it seems to be an *Intellectual Operation*) together with *Bigotry, and Pharisaism*, which some *Fanciful, Wayward, and Contumacious Men* Create in their Brains, and Blasphemously *Christen* with the *Holy Name of the Spirit, and Conscience*. Which in truth are Nothing but *Phrenzy, and the Lunatick Productions of Distempered Heads*. And what are the *Fatal Effects* of these *Mischievous, and Diabolical Intoxications*, if not kept under a *Timely Government, and Restraint*, scarce any *Kingdom in Europe*, but can sadly Testify, and *Our own* in particular, even to this Day, may *Lament, and for the future Deprecate*.

5. The *Last Instance*, I shall produce of a *Mistaken Conscience in the World*, is what it calls *Honour*; which, since *Religion* is grown out of *Fashion*, is now become the *Gentleman's Conscience*. *Christianity* forsooth must be Discaided by some *Men of Honour*, as a *Narrow Institution*, fit only for *Bookish Pedants*, that are unacquainted with the *way of the World*; their *Reason* must be as *Loose, and Unconfined as their Lives*; and they scorn tamely to submit, to an *Incredible, and Mysterious Revelation*, which to their *Refined Understanding*, is meer *Nonsense, and Priest-Craft*; if through an high Strain of *Complaisance*, they condescend to Own any *Natural, or Moral Duty*, 'tis well if they mean any thing by it, besides the *fulfilling their Lusts, and Pleasures*; As if they were Born for nothing else but *Ease and Luxury*, and the *World* was made for these useleſs *Leviathans* to take their *Pastime therein*; *Fortune, Quality and Condition*, it seems are sufficient *Privileges* to give their Possessors a *Dispensation* from the *Power and Obligation of Laws*, and to *Exempt* these *Favourites of Heaven* (as they deem themselves) from all their *Penalties*, by a *Peculiar Prerogative* above their *Fellow Creatures*; As if, by how much the greater *Bounty*, God has Bestowed upon them, so much the less *Gratitude* they Owed to him, and their *Acknowledgments* were still to be lessened by the *Increase of his Favours*. These are the Persons, who, by their Own Authority, would *supersede the Law of God*, and make *Themselves, and their Own Licentious Wills*, the sole *Guide, and Rule of their Actions*; which, in their *Dialect*, they are pleas'd to *Varnish* with the *Glittering Colour of Honour*; a Thing, which these *Empty, and Noisy Pretenders* to, talk as loudly and confidently about, as if they really understood what it Meant. Whereas (God knows) they want as much to be *Instructed in the True Nature of this*, as in that *Religion*, which they so *Ignorantly* laugh at, and so *Presumptuously* despise. Otherwise they would not, in *Defiance of the Wisdom of all Laws, Human, and Divine*, set up a *Senseless Notions of Bravery*, to dignify *Malice, and Murder*; and take that to be the *Only Satisfaction of the Gentleman*, which must be the *Damnation of the Christian*. In short, where Men abandon their *Faith and the Fear of God, Conscience and Honour*, are insignificant Sounds, and *Deceitful Expressions*, which Men that have *Neither*, make use of to *Impose upon those that have*. There are doubtless many Men, who abstain from the *Commission of some Impious, and Detestable Actions*, purely with respect to *common Decency, a Sense of Generosity, or the Rules of Good Breeding*, without any *Regard had to those of Religion, or the Commands of GOD*. That is, to speak the plain Truth, they scorn to be *Guilty of any thing that may render 'em Little, and Contemptible in the Esteem of Men of Worth and Gravity*; so that indeed it is their *Charatter, not Integrity, the Reputation and Applause of Men*, not the *Answer of a Good Conscience, that Governs their Conduct*. How little are these *Gentlemen* acquainted with the sound *Notion of True Honour*, which is a much more *Exalted Principle*, than they take it for, and Springs from a more *Noble and Beautiful Original*. This is not the *Degenerate Off-spring of Sin, or Villany*, does not arise from any *Vicious Qualities, as Pride, Hypocrisy, Ostentation, Revenge, or Ambition*; but is founded upon the *Real Worth, and Intrinsic Goodness of Things*; Springs from *God, and the Law*; the *Sole Fountains of Honour*, to whose *Precepts, and Injunctions*, it always pays a *Just Subordination, and Deference*. This indeed is not so much a *Single Virtue* in it self, as the *Seasoning Qualification, and Embellishment of All other Virtues*; which (to draw a *Compendious Description of its Lovely Properties*) Sets a *Man above all Fear, but that of doing any thing*

Base or Dishonest; which makes him Abhor, as much to Detract from his Enemy, as to Flatter his Friend; to Scorn Hypocrisy, tho' 'twere for his Interest; and detest Injustice, tho' it might Gratify his Revenge; which renders him Dutiful and Submissive to his Superiors; Affable, Obliging, and Generous even to his Inferiors; and, in a Word, that makes him, on all Occasions, Exemplify his Steady Loyalty to his Prince, his Inviolable Love to his Country, his untainted Fidelity to his Friend, his open Hospitality to Strangers, his Perpetual Charity to the Poor, and his Universal Beneficence to All the World. This is that Charming Character, which alone Constitutes a Man of True Honour, who certainly is the Best Man in the World, next to a Man of Conscience, who still Rises higher in his Principles, and makes GOD and his Duty the Sole, and Ultimate End of All his Actions.

Thus I have Run through all those Causes, which I take to be the Grounds of an Erroneous, and Misguided Conscience; all which I have drawn from the Nature, and Motives, of Human Actions, which is Resolving them into their Principles, and (as I humbly conceive) the Best, and Truest way of Explaining them. Such as are Interest, and Prejudice, the Delusions of Our several Passions, and Affections, Superstition, Pride, Fear, Ignorance, and mistaken Zeal, Imagination, and Fancy, Reputation, and False Honour: All which are Wrong Grounds of Practice, and can never properly Justify Our Conduct. We see how many Ways there are that lead to Error; for that single One, that Directs Us Safely, and Infallibly to Truth, and how liable we are to be Betray'd, into Any, or All, of them. And methinks the Dangerous Consequence might fore-warn Us to beware of taking up False Principles at first; for if these are founded on an Unsound, and Treacherous Bottom, the whole Course of Our Lives being Grounded upon Sin, and Error, must needs be one continued Mistake, and so insensibly carry us on to, and at length End in Ruine, and Confusion. So Bewitching is the Imposture, we may be seduced into it, and not know what we are doing: There being a Way (as the Wise Man tells us) that may seem Right in a Man's own Eyes, when nevertheless the End of that Way is Death. And without doubt in this lamentable Case, a Man may Govern the whole Course, and Tenour of his Life and Actions by a Rule, that may thro' Prejudice, or a want of due Examination, appear Just, and True in his Own Judgment, and notwithstanding find himself Judg'd of GOD, by a quite Contrary one at the Last Day. This is the Vast, and Frightful Danger of Founding Our Conscience, upon Wrong Principles in the Beginning, which is the Great and most Common Occasion of Error; but there is Another, which tho' not so Frequent, is however of no less Perilous a Consequence, and that is a False Application of Right Principles. In this Case, a Man sets out well for his Journey, but for want of a Guide, or Conduct, Mistakes his Road, Wanders up and down, is at length Bewilder'd, and lost, and so Falls short of the designed Happy End, or his Travels. Of such Infinite Concern, and Importance is it, if We would avoid these Dismal Miscarriages, to make Our selves thoroughly acquainted with the Nature, and Obligation, of the Exact Rule of Our Actions, and the Proper Use that We should make of it in the Application; which brings me in the last place,

III. Thirdly, to State those General laws, whereby the Conscience is to be Regulated, and to shew how they Ought to be Apply'd. Now the Whole Extent, and Obligation of Conscience, tho' seemingly so very Copious, is Bounded by these Three Laws.

1. The Divine, 2. The Political, and 3. The Moral Law.

1. The First, being the Immediate Command of God, is the Great Supream, and Transcendent law of all, wherein is Summon'd up a Full, and Comprehensive View, of Our Christian Duty, and the Will of God, entirely Revealed to the World,

2. The Second, is the Law of all Civil Societies, by which are to be Try'd all Actions relating to Government, and whatsoever is Committed betwixt Man, and Man; which in Subordination to the First, and if not Contrary to it, lays Great Force, and Indispensible Obligation of Duty upon every Subject, this Obligation being Ratified by the Divine law,

3. The last is that law, whereby We are to Try the Good, or Evil, of our Actions, as they stand related to Virtue, or Vice, and are founded upon the Principles of Reason, and the light of Nature. The other Two laws are Superstructures upon This law, which being the Dictate of Nature, written by God in Our Hearts, was, and is the Rule of Our Actions whenever the Other Two laws are Silent.

By the Conformity of our Actions to these Three laws, as those Actions lie under their Peculiar Jurisdiction, and Cognizance, We are to take the Measures of their Rectitude, or Obliquity, and denominate them Good, or Bad, Vertuous, or Vicious: and a Man's Conscience may always Acquit Him, where it does not appear Obnoxious to One of These laws; according to That Eternal Maxim of the Scriptures, Where there is no law, there is no Transgression: Now tho' the Holy Scriptures are the Grand, Sovereign law of all, so that Nothing can be Authoriz'd in any Inferior law, that is any ways Repugnant, or Contrary to That,

yet it must be Acknowledged, not to be, the *Universal, Adequate Rule of Conscience*: Neither must We expect every thing to be *Commanded* therein, which may be the *Injunction of Particular laws*; for this would *Superfede, and Frustrate* their End; neither is there any *Absolute Necessary*, of *Justifying* any *Peculiar law* with *Authority* drawn from the *Scriptures*, unless as it is *expressly Prohibited* therein; or by *Manifest, and Undeniable Deductions*, concluded from thence to be *Unlawful*.

That these laws, take in the whole *Compass of Human Duty*, is *Evident*; in that they Answer to the *Three Great Branches, or Distinct Offices* of it, relating to *God, Our Neighbour, and Our Selves*. The *First*, shewing what We *Owe to Our Creatour, as Men, and Christians*; The *Second*, what We *Owe to Our Brethren, as Members of the Body Politick, in Our Publick Capacities*; and the *Third*, what we *Owe to Our Selves, in Our Private Capacity*; as far as it is discoverable by the *Principles of Revelation, the Rules of Civil Justice, the light of Nature, and the Dictates of Reason*.

Thus I have given as *Short, and I hope as clear a View of this Momentous Point*, as the Time would Allow me, and to Close up the Whole, shall further Intreat Your Patience, whilst I briefly shew, how those *Rules* may be *Applied*:

1. To *Settle a Doubtful*, 2. To *Quiet a Scrupulous*, and 3. To *Correct an Erroneous Conscience*.

I. And *First, to Settle a Doubtful Conscience*. In Order to which, this *Maxim* is to be Observed, That the *Commands of Our Conscience* should be *always Regarded*, but the *Prohibitions* must be *strictly Obeyed*. For we ought as much to *Abstain from Doing* any thing, that is but *Probably lawful*, as from *Doing* what may be *Possibly Unlawful*; because the *Mind* must *Act* by its *light, Will, and Consent*. And there is *Great Hazard* lying on *both Sides*; whereas upon the *Other*, a Man may be *Satisfied* in what He does, and *Runs no great Venture*, at least falls into no *Sin*, if in the *Matter of Debate*, He has used *All Just, and Requisite Endeavours*, to satisfy himself about what should *Possibly prove Unlawful*. Doubt always *Implies a Thought of Injustice*, and therefore the *Holy Ghost Guards* against it, with the most *Positive and Peremptory Threat of Hell, and Damnation*: He that *Doubteth* (saith he) *is Damned if He Eat, for whatever is not of Faith, is Sin*. Rom. 14. 23. But in Case of *Necessity*, where *Two Things* are *Proposed to Us to be Done*, and the *Mind hangs in Suspence* as to the *Apprehension of Evil*, certainly it must place its *Election* where there is the *least Danger*; for here the *less Evil* puts on the *Nature of Good*; but where the *Choice is Free to Act, or not to Act*, He flies in the *Face of God, and his Own Conscience*, that *Presumes without a Full Persuasion*. The most *Effectual Method*, I know of, to *Settle, and Compose the Doubts of Our Conscience*, is to be *Contented with those Probable, and Moral Evidences*, that Things are *Capable of*, and to *suspect the Illegality of Nothing*, but what lies under a *Positive Prohibition*, either from the *incontestable Demonstrations of Reason*, or the *Express Words of Scripture*; according to that Rule of the *Apostle* in a Case of the *same Nature*, which may be a *Standing Direction to Us in all others, I know, and am persuaded* (saith He) *by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing Unclean of is self; but to him that Esteemeth any thing to be Unclean, to him it is Unclean*. Rom. 14. 14.

2. Secondly, To *Quiet a Scrupulous Conscience*. And in this Case, I think, there is often more need of a *Physician*, than a *Confessor*; for the *Body* (as I said before) is *Generally more out of Order*, than the *Soul*. For those *Groundless Misapprehensions, Misgiving Jealousies, and Imaginary Fears*, that usually disturb its *Repose*, are many times, not so much the *Results of Reason*, as the *Natural Effects of Vapours, and Melancholly*; and what are to be *Cured*, rather by a *Corporeal, than a Mental Application*. If they are not *Prejudicial to the Health of the One*, they can scarce affect that of the *Other*; and deserve, in some Cases, to be *Answered with Neglect, and Contempt*. However, it is the *Duty of such Persons*, whose *Just Scruples* proceed from the *Ignorance of, or Mistakes in, the Knowledge of the Means of Salvation*; or from the *terrible Dread of God's Judgments, and the Consciousness of their Own manifold Iniquities*; to have *Recourse to those Spiritual Guides only, whom Christ, and his Church has set over them, to Watch for Their Souls*; that from *Them* they may receive *Sound Instruction in their Faith, Fatherly Advice in their Conduct, and Ghostly Consolation in their Troubles*. And let such Persons rest assured, that the *Ruine of their Souls*, will as inevitably follow, as the *Destruction of their Bodies*, if at any time they *Pretume to Trust the State of either, with Itinerant Quacks, and Pretending, Ignorant Empiricks in Physick or Divinity*.

3. Lastly, to *Correct an Erroneous Conscience*. In order to which this *Maxim* must be Observed; That the *Conscience Misapprehending the Nature of any thing*, may from its being *Essentially Good, or Indifferent*, render it *Accidentally, and Relatively Evil, to the Person*

to Erring in his Conceptions. But on the contrary, no Misapprehension of the Conscience, can render any thing that is Evil, or Illegal, in it self, any ways Good, or Valid. For a Man may be Bound by his Opinion, in the One Case, but can never by It, Justify himself, or alter the Unchangeable, and Intrinsic Nature of Things in the Other. It is a most Wretched, Unhappy, and Slavish Condition to Follow an Erroneous Guide; for which way soever we take, either With, or Against, This Erring Conscience, We are Concluded under an Unavoidable Necessity of Sinning; for if We Obey its Commands, we Neglect Our Duty; and if we Do Our Duty, We sin against Our Judgment. And tho' it may seem safest to Transgress upon the Side of Conscience, yet the Mistake of That, can never be a Plea for Unjustifiable Actions. What a Fatal Dilemma does the Devil, and a Man's Own Folly bring him into in this Case! He casts a stumbling Block, and a Rock of Offence before Himself, which He cannot Avoid Falling, and Splitting upon. So unhappily do some Men Fetter themselves with their Own Notions, and lay such Chains, and Burdens upon their Consciences, as they are not Able to bear. There is but One way to get out of this Hellish Snare and that is to Break these Bonds, and cast these Cords from Us: To Examine thoroughly Our Principles, and to Rectify Our Judgments; to divest Our Selves of Interest, Prejudice, and Affection; to keep the Upper Region of the Soul, Clear and Serene, neither Clouded by Lust, nor Discompos'd with the Heats of Passion; for these never fail to Stupify, and Besot the Mind, and will in time, not only make the Conscience Insensible; but (in the Elegant language of the Scripture) Sear it with a Red Hot Iron. To prevent which Lamentable Condition, we must frequently Retire into Our Selves to State, and Adjust the Great Accounts betwixt God and Our Souls; that no Crime may pass Unretracted, no Slip Unobserved, no Infirmary Uncorrected, no Presumptuous Sin Unsubdued. Thus we shall Preserve a Tender and Quick Sense upon the Mind; the least Approaches of Vice, will Alarm, and Rouse its Faculties; that no Temptation may surprize, no Passion entice it into Guilt. Since it is so Easily Betrayed into, and so Difficultly Reclaim'd out of an Error, we cannot with too severe Circumspection Watch over all its Motions, Obey all its Checks, and Revere its Verdict and Sentence. Which Labour however, will be Amply Rewarded with the Blissful, and Rejoycing Testimony of a good Conscience, that with Simplicity, and Godly Sincerity, not with Fleishly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, We have so had Our Conversation in this World, that Our Conversation will be always (what it has been in some Measure here too) in Heaven. Upon this depends all the Tranquillity, Peace, and Enjoyment of this life; as well as the Happiness of the Next. For the Reviling Clamours, and Upbraiding Reproaches of a Wounded Spirit who can Bear? When that should sustain a Man's Infirmities, is it self Broken and Confounded, what can Support him, thus Bereav'd of his last Comfort, and left destitute of the very Pillar, and Bottom that he must Stand upon? He must Inevitably Sink, that thus Fails in the Foundation. So much is it Our Interest, as well as Duty, if we ever think to Bear up against the Calamities of This World, or go with Satisfaction, and Manfully meet Death in its most Ghastly Visage, Herein continually to Exercise Our Selves, to keep a Conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Men.

F I N I S.



